



Jonsonian recasting and her "eclosure tower"

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Abstract

The Danae scene is also in potentially disturbing ways via intertextual gesturings to Shakespeare's Othello and the murder in that play of the chaste Desdemona in her bed. The Sibilla scene had also previously alluded to Othello in the line "I'll play the horrid murtheresse for this once, / I'll kisse thee ere I kill thee." The scenes ebb in and out of audience consciousness, complicating one-dimensional readings of the sexuality and actions within them. Misogyny is not the entire story in the sympathy this evokes for Danae and her female counterparts in the play, but the continued eroticisation and financially reductive readings of the myth cannot be underestimated either. In Heywood's play, Jupiter, in a movement akin to the Jonsonian recastings and reconfigurations of the Danae myth, gains access to her tower enclosure by bribing with jewels, almost effortlessly, the four Beldams who have been placed on guard.

Introduction

Fortunately, Denison had included campanology in his studies and as early as 1854 had been asked to act as referee for the design and construction of the bells.

As the furnaces at Cripplegate were not capable of receiving such a large mould, it was decided that the great bell should be cast at Stockton-on-Tees, with Warners being responsible for its removal to London. The casting of the four smaller bells presented no problem to the Cripplegate foundry, but as Warners were unable to guarantee the note which would be sounded by the hour bell, their casting was delayed until this was known. Denison specified that the composition of all the bells should be twenty-two parts copper to seven parts of tin. In the nineteenth century there was no way of gauging the exact mixture of the metals nor of measuring their temperature while molten, so the casting of such a large bell was a matter of some concern. Hitherto, no bell approaching 14 tons had been cast by a British foundry, the largest in Britain at the time being Great Peter, the bourdon bell of York Minster, which had been installed in 1845 and which weighed 10 tons. As this was to be the heaviest bell which had ever been

made in Britain, it must have been with some trepidation that the mould was constructed and preparations were made for casting.

On 6 August 1856, the furnaces were fired and the great bell was cast. There were celebrations in the foundry when the mould was opened and the casting was seen to be complete, and this mood of celebration quickly spread to London where people had begun to wonder when they could expect to see the completion of the clock which they had been promised more than 20 years earlier. Now that the great bell had been cast, the difficulty which presented itself was that of having the bell in Stockton-on-Tees and the clock in London. It was not considered practical to attempt transporting the bell by road due to the poor condition of the nation's highways and the length of the journey involved, and as such a load would have undoubtedly exceeded the railway's loading gauge, some other method of transport had to be found. It was decided to convey the bell by sea, so it was taken to the nearby port of West Hartlepool from where it could continue its journey to London by ship. The bell was loaded on to a schooner, *The Wave*.

At this stage it became apparent that the bell was much heavier than its intended weight of 14 tons (in fact it

weighed 16 tons), for it fell several inches from its support on to the deck, causing considerable damage and forcing the ship to put into dry dock for repair. It must have seemed that circumstances were conspiring against the bell for when the vessel was finally put to sea she was caught in a heavy storm, and in London it was not long before rumours began to spread that both ship and bell had been lost. Fortunately, *The Wave* weathered the storm and there was great rejoicing in London on 21 October 1856 when she docked safely, bearing valuable cargo undamaged. On arrival at the Port of London the bell was taken to the Cripplegate foundry where it underwent a further inspection. The bell was found to produce the note E: once this had been ascertained it was possible to cast the four quarter bells to harmonise. At one time there were many foundries scattered throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom supplying bells for the numerous churches which were being built, but nowadays the few churches which are under construction are seldom provided with bells, so that the number of bell foundries has declined to such an extent that only a few remain. As with the clock, tenders were invited from three founders for the manufacture of the bells – John Warner

& Sons of Cripplegate, the Whitechapel Bell Foundry and John Taylor & Company of Loughborough. Like Benjamin Vulliamy before him, George Mears of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry considered himself to be at the top of his craft and declined to tender in competition with anyone else. He also claimed that bells had been made at Whitechapel since before the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and, moreover, that his was the only firm in Britain with sufficient expertise to cast such a large bell. Warners were very keen to point out that they had recently commissioned two new large furnaces for their foundry at Norton, near Stockton-on-Tees, while Taylors insisted on receiving payment in advance. This was unacceptable to the Government and so the contract was let to Warners. The Danae myth also had relevance for the theories of alchemy that were so prevalent in Jonson's age and which of course provided the basis for his subsequent stage comedy, *The Alchemist* (1610): the sublimatory process was frequently represented as taking place in a tower in alchemical illustrations and was described as a penetrative or even sexual act, the alchemical process penetrating matter. [1] In such a reading, Danae might become an emblem or figure for the translated matter of alchemy, a theme that in-

trigued Jonson and other contemporary Jacobean poets such as John Donne. Katharine Eisaman Maus has, however, reflected on these evocations and invocations in Jonsonian drama, both of myth and the alchemical theme, regarding them as predominantly sceptical in tone and approach: "Jonson's use of traditionally polysignificant myths of metamorphosis, myths so important to Elizabethan and Jacobean comedy, reveals as surely do his comic plots, his general suspicion of the sublimatory process." [2] Maus goes on to discuss how the Ovidian mythological canon became susceptible in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to a "sort of bivalent allegorization": as the previous discussion of artistic depictions of the story have indicated, Jonson is not alone in deploying the Danae myth to "suggest both prostitution and the descent of divine grace." [3]

What makes this visual image provided by the canvas symbolically apposite for the film audience's own spectatorship of the Milly-Merton encounter is the explicit connection it makes between sex and money, the two driving forces of James's 1902 novel. In classical mythology, Danae was impregnated by Jove in the form of a shower of gold, but the coins flowing into the female protagonist's vagi-

na in the Klimt interpretation are far from ambiguous signifiers. An intriguing question therefore is at what stage did this highly secularised reading of the Danae story – one in which the shower of gold becomes money in its most tangible form – begin to predominate? An investigation of early modern drama begins to suggest that it was in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that this idea took hold. This essay is a distillation of that search. In a telling scene from the film version of Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* (dir. Iain Softley, 1998), Merton Densher, already engaged in an illicit encounter with his lover Kate Croy, meets unexpectedly at an art gallery with the American heiress Milly Theale. She takes him to view Gustav Klimt's painting of Danae.

The opening octave of the sixth sonnet of Sir Philip Sidney's Elizabethan sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* is a charming indicator of the extent to which the prose, plays, and poetry of the early modern period were indeed 'embroidered' with mythological stories deriving ostensibly from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Jove's seduction/rape of Europa, Io, Leda and others in various disguises and shapes, many of them animalistic:

Jonathan Bate's *Shakespeare and Ovid* has indicated the importance of this

tapestry of allusion and appropriation for Shakespearean poetry and playtexts and other scholars have recently extended this argument to include Shakespeare's contemporaries and successors. [2] In that respect, the bulls and swans of early modern literature are well accounted for. But the "golden raine" that Sidney's sonnet evokes is more complicated, not least because it does not receive its full exposition in the *Metamorphoses*. Alluded to briefly at the close of Book 4 and the start of Book 5 as part of Perseus's narrative, Danae's story is an example of Ovid's self-conscious marginalisation, "radical abbreviation," and sidelining of central myths that Richard Tarrant has identified as a central strategy in his work. [3] Her story is subsumed into her son's narrative of self (he is according to l.1 of the Arthur Golding translation "Danae's noble son" and at 4.855-6 he refers to himself as "son of her whom in her father's tower/ The mighty Jove begat with child in shape of golden shower") or embedded within the reaction of other characters to him:

King Cephey's brother, Phiney,
was the man that rashly gave
The first occasion of this fray; who,
shaking in his hand
A dart of ash with head of steel, said,
"Lo, lo, here I stand

To challenge thee that wrongfully
my ravished dost hold.

Thy wings nor yet thy forgèd dad
in shape of feignèd gold
Shall now not save thee from my
hands." [4]

There are other, though equally slight, allusions to Danae elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*: Arachne embroiders her story (6.138-9) and Midas describes water he has turned to gold as capable of deceiving Danae (11.129-30)), but Ovid would appear to be little concerned with the Danae storyline *per se* in these truncated versions. And yet the story of Jove's rape of the incarcerated Danae (placed in a supposedly impermeable bronze tower by her fearful father when he is informed by an oracle that her future child will be his murderer) is a pervasive presence in the literatures of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, particularly in dramatic texts. The relationship of these invocations both to Ovid and other potential sources forms a complex and shifting narrative that raises questions of its own about myth, money, society, theatre and gender. A detailed tracing of the deployment of the Danae myth in such diverse representational sites as Elizabethan poems by Sidney and Marlowe and plays by Shakespeare, Jacobean dramas by Jonson and Heywood, and a Caroline

playtext by James Shirley, confirms in interesting ways the commonplace assumption that myths are retold according to the morals and ethical interests of the society, age or moment in which they are reproduced.

The particular focus of the latter discussion will be James Shirley's 1633 *The Bird in a Cage*.

The ostensible subject of this article is, then, early Stuart drama, but it would be misleading to suggest that theatre provided the sole domain of interest in the Danae myth in the early modern period. Christopher Marlowe made vivid play with the storyline in his poetry, both in his translations of Ovid's *Elegies* (where further examples of Ovidian encounters with the Danae story can be located) and in *Hero and Leander*, where the glass pavement in Venus's temple, depicting "gods in sundry shapes," has beneath it "Danae's statue in a brazen tower." [6] Renaissance painters had also shown considerable interest in the theme. Titian's 1545 painting of Danae, commissioned by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and now hanging in Naples, is a famously sensuous work that portrays a naked Danae's sexual openness to the shower of gold (something echoed in Klimt's twentieth-century version) rather than any overt sense of violation in or even resistance to the

act of penetration. Jan Gossaert (better known as Mabuse) produced a rather more restrained version in 1527 in which Danae is depicted semi-naked but almost Madonna-like in her acceptance of this immaculate conception. Mabuse's version would seem to chime with the one invocation of Danae's story in a Shakespearean context: the reference in *Romeo and Juliet* to "saint-seducing gold" (1.1.207). [7] In that latter allusion, Romeo is stressing the inviolable nature of his love Rosaline: she, unlike Danae, will be able to resist such temptations, even though the very best of people, saints, are open to such seduction. It is open to interpretation whether Romeo is criticizing Danae here or exonerating her on the grounds that even saints would be tempted. In that respect, Shakespeare charts a course between the Titian and Mabuse versions. These two visual examples alone suggest the ways in which the personal inflections of the artist affect the readings of the Danae story as a rape or a seduction or even something entirely different, as in Mabuse's case, a positive visitation. [8] Danae was simultaneously read as a female victim and as agent in her narrative trajectory and the early Stuart period inherited this multiple set of interpretations. In the early 1600s, drama in particular exhibited a

strong interest in reworking the narrative, political, social, and sexual agency of this existent storyline for its own purposes. The purpose of the remainder of this article is not simply to catalogue these manifestations of the myth but to historicize and localize the readings of them, and to suggest in the process that the particular stance adopted by each interpretation can tell us much about the cultural contexts in which they are produced.

In Jonson's *Volpone* (1605-6), that gold-driven text, Mosca, the flesh-fly servant who attends the Venetian magnifico, reflects on the power of gold at length and in doing so alludes directly to the Danae story:

Why, your gold
Is such another medicine, it dries up
All those offensive savours! It transforms
The most deformed, and restores 'em love-
ly,
As 'twere the strange poetical girdle. Jove
Could not invent, 't'himself, a shroud
more subtle
To pass Acrisius' guards.

(5.2.98-104) [9]

Elsewhere in this play the sexually motivated metamorphoses of Jove are evoked as part of Volpone's specious rhetoric of seduction: my dwarf shall dance,
My eunuch sing, my fool make up the antic.

Whilst we, in changèd shapes, act Ovid's
tales,
Thou, like Europa now, and I like Jove,
Then I like Mars, and thou like Erycine,
So, of the rest, till we have quite run
through
And wearied all the fables of the gods.
(*Volpone*, 3.7.218-24)

Jonson accurately picks up on the potential dualistic reinterpretation of the stories of Jovian seduction and rape, in both monetary and performative terms. In Mosca's cynical speech, Jonson reproduces the ostensibly materialist interpretation of the trope of the golden shower as a purely fiscal action: one in which a golden shower penetrates the keylock only in the pragmatic sense of the guards being bribed to open the door of Danae's prison. Depending on the inflection of each retelling, Danae could be presented as the victim or the participant in this act of corruption. In Volpone's rhetoric, the sheer theatricality of Jove's assumed disguises for the purposes of seducing/raping Europa, Calisto, Danae et al is foregrounded, and once again, the proactive role of Danae and her female counterparts is a matter of point of view. Celia, the object of Volpone's *carpe diem* persuasions in this scene, is a clear figure of resistance on the stage, however, offer-

ing an alternative reading of the stories to Volpone's celebratory one.

Maus's study had obvious intellectual investments in arguing for, and delineating, a "Roman Ben Jonson" and yet, surprisingly, in her account of his sceptical reworking of myths, she did not cite his most obvious source for a demythologized reading of Danae: Horace's Ode 3.16:

*A tower of bronze, thick oak doors,
savage dogs
Awake all night and day ready to bark,
Would have sufficed to keep Danae locked
up*

From lovers that prowl in the dark.

*If Venus and Jupiter had not played
the girl's
Fear-ridden guard, Acrisius, that funny
Trick: they knew that the way would be
smoothed, made safe*

For a god in the form of money!

*Gold glides past sentinels and minis-
ters*

*Straight to the throne, strikes deeper into
the*

rock
The early Stuart age did not then initiate these cynical interpretations of the myth, although they seem to reach their zenith in that moment, at least in terms of English literary traditions. A comparable cynicism is implicit in Golding's previously quoted Englishing of the *Metamorphoses* in 1565 and

1567 which describes Jove's golden shower not as an aesthetic event but in terms of forgery and counterfeit: "thy forgèd dad." Jonson, influenced as ever by the Horatian paradigms, adopts and adapts these literalist interpretations of the myth to his own dramatic ends.

The critique of political corruption implicit in the Horatian ode quoted above is certainly a motivating factor in Jonson's attribution of this materialistic version of the Danae story to Fulvia the politically aware prostitute in his Roman tragedy *Catiline* (1611).

SEMPRONIA Does Caesar give well?

*FULVIA They shall all give and pay well
that come here*

*If they will have it, and that jewels, pearl,
Plate, or round sums, to buy these. I am
not taken*

*With a cob-swan or a high-mounting bull
As foolish Leda and Europa were,
But the bright gold, with Danae. For such
price*

*I would endure a rough, harsh Jupiter
Or ten such thundering gamesters, and
refrain*

*To laugh at 'em till they are gone, with my
much suff'ring.*

(*Catiline*, 2.1.176-

85) [14]

This specific reference is registered by Maus as a further example of Jon-

son's innate scepticism in adapting myth, but what is also important to note is that in the course of this play Fulvia uses her occupation and its access to men in power to exploit and influence the political situation. By aligning herself with Danae in particular, she accords a similar form of political agency to her mythical counterpart and differentiates her from the other objects of Jove's seductions in the *Metamorphoses*: this Danae allows seduction specifically for personal gain, unlike Leda or Europa who are undoubtedly constructed as sexual victims.

In *Eastward Ho!*, a text that Jonson co-authored with John Marston and George Chapman in 1605, the goldsmith's daughter Gertrude is a figure of abject vanity and blatant social aspiration. Her overwhelming desire for social status explains her disastrous marriage to the mushroom knight, Sir Petronel Flash. It is intriguing therefore to note that she too makes reference to Danae, that gold-linked mythological female, in a song (a ballad which I have not been able to trace in any ballad collection from this period) "o'the Golden Shower" (5.1.109):

The unquestioned linkage Mammon effects here between sexual seduction and financial temptation reflects the duality of epicureanism and

brute finance of his nomenclature; it also reflects that bivalent interpretation of the Danae storyline already identified.

These fiscal versions and inversions of the Danae myth cluster in the Jonsonian canon in playtexts authored and staged during the early Jacobean period: a time of concern over the state of Treasury and the Sale of Titles to bolster it, a reflection on which can be registered in Jonson's parodic portrayal of the new knight Mammon. There was in this political moment a deep social anxiety about money and a fear that it could be exploited by the wealthy to gain positions of patronage and power. The appropriations of the Danae storyline have a political as well as theatrical and literary undertow. What helps to endorse this claim is the fact that it was not just Jonson who was utilising the story in this way at this time: Thomas Heywood's aforementioned *The Golden Age* is an intriguing version of the same.

The Golden Age is the first of Heywood's five 'Age plays' written for the commercial public theatre and performed "sundry times" at the Red Bull in north London in 1611. Kate McLuskie provides a thought-provoking account of Heywood's career in her *Dekker and Heywood*, describing both her subject dramatists as

writers who shifted their style and approach in accordance with the fashions of the times and the venues in which they were working. [17] Their public theatre plays were particularly eclectic: *The Golden Age*, for example, combines elements of comedy and tragedy, comic-heroic juxtapositions, dumb-shows and masque, as well as intertextual allusions to Marlowe, Shakespeare and the classics. The playtext is highly episodic, commencing with Saturn and Titan's battle for supremacy and the consequent acceptance of the throne by Saturn in return for an oath on his part to murder any sons born to him. Only in the latter section of the drama does the Danae myth come into view, when the audience witnesses Jupiter's penetration of her self-enclosing tower and female community. This scene operates, both within the play and within its wider literary context, however, in fascinatingly intertextual and intra-textual ways that are worth unpacking here.

Throughout the play, Jupiter is seen performing acts of invasion, intrusion and usurpation: the space of the stage is usually the site of his literal penetration. Early on in the play, Jupiter invades Lycaon's bedchamber where he spies and becomes enamoured of Calisto. Later, in order to gain access to the all-female community of

Diana, whom Calisto has joined, he cross-dresses. The latter is a comic section of the play: Diana, impressed by the strapping *arrivante* reflects: "A manly Lasse, a stout Virago." An audience-titillating scene of seduction ensues, when Jupiter hangs back from Diana's hunt and invites Calisto to join him. They lie down and "kisse and play." [18] The lesbian possibilities of this scene of erotic seduction are of course counterbalanced by the audience's awareness of Jupiter's disguise, although the awareness of the boy actors who would have played both roles returns us to the homoerotic potential. It is a theatrical possibility in the staging of Ovidian and sub-Ovidian myths that Caroline drama would also exploit.

In *The Golden Age*, it should be stressed that, despite the comedy, Jupiter's actions are subjected to something of a critique. This is partially achieved by means of the complex series of repetitions – both circular and linear – and reflections and refractions that occur throughout the drama. The early scene in which we see a distraught Sibilla (Saturn's wife) in childbed, planning to steal away her second son from the execution Saturn has promised the gods will be the fate of his male children, is later troublingly recalled when we see Danae in her candlelit bed. The

spatial dynamics of the scenes connect the women as victims of the gods' decrees.

Heywood and Jonson, then, both employ the Danae myth within a complex dynamic of discursive and performative ruminations on money and society. That critique is liberated, or at least made possible, by the theatrical medium, and, I would argue, by both of these writers' complex negotiations between the demands of elite and popular cultures. These are distinctly Jacobean plays and distinctly public theatre influenced and this is the way in which we must begin to decode their mythological inscriptions. But it is the theatrical and political aspect to their interpretations, rather than the financial or commercial subtexts, which is picked up and reinterpreted in its turn by subsequent Caroline drama. Here we need to establish the new context of increasingly private theatre located playtexts, dramas influenced by, if not necessarily subordinated to, the court and certainly influenced by the vogue for masques and entertainments at the court of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, and in particular impacted by the growing debate about female performers, professional and amateur, a debate galvanized by Henrietta Maria's Whitehall theatricals. [20]

The writings of James Shirley need to be very firmly located in this context. As part of Henrietta Maria's circle at court, his public theatre writings clearly engage with the concerns and interests of that group. His play *The Bird in a Cage* (1633) certainly needs to be read within that political and artistic context. On the surface a play about courtship against parental wishes, it involves an extensive play within a play performed by women characters (though they were in turn realised by boy actors) that provokes or enables several supportive statements about female acting. Intriguingly, the play within a play tells the story of Danae. A detailed consideration of why Shirley deploys this myth in his 1633 drama will help to indicate the shift the myth had undergone by the 1630s, from being an example of fiscal reductionism in Jacobean city comedy and urban satire to a storyline with a potential for readings of female agency and performative power in the romance-saturated atmosphere of the Caroline era.

The context of 1633 also demands that we note the actions and printed outbursts of William Prynne as a shaping influence on Shirley's play. Prynne was the Inns of Court lawyer who was imprisoned for his anti-theatrical, and specifically anti-female theatrical,

statements in his 1000-page printed pamphlet, *Histriomastix*. His text is infamous for its index listing of women actors as "notorious whores" that was taken to be a direct attack on the Queen herself, who had been conducting much talked about rehearsals for a performance of Walter Montagu's specially commissioned pastoral *The Shepherd's Paradise* now. There were of course many other issues, mainly theological, at stake in Prynne's text but it is the issue of women and drama that helped to shape public understanding of its controversy. Shirley makes an ironic dedication of *The Bird in a Cage* to Prynne, who was himself imprisoned in another all-too tangible Tower when it was performed and published. The context of Prynne's attack on women and theatricals is thereby signalled by the playwright himself as relevant to the concerns of his play and may in turn help to shed light on the choice of the Danae storyline in particular.

The Bird in a Cage makes its opposition to Prynne, and by extension its empathy for the Queen's particular brand of female theatricals, overt in its dedication but also in its embedded play within a play. The plotline of Shirley's playtext, in brief, is that Eugenia, the Duke of Mantua's daughter, has fallen in love with Philenzo. Her

father however refuses to allow the match since he has another intended for his daughter. To ensure her obedience to his will, the Duke locks Eugenia in a tower along with several ladies in waiting for company. Denied any contact with men, the women bond in an intimate version of the all-female community that Diana's forest grouping also represented in *The Golden Age*. During their incarceration, various male suitors attempt to break into the confines of the tower with varying degrees of comedy and success. Philenzo, now in disguise as Rolliardo, conspires to break in by means of bribery. He is eventually successful when he hides in the central pillar of a cage of exotic birds that is presented as a gift to Eugenia. There are then surface links to the Danae storyline in the main plotline of the play – both in the image of the incarcerated daughter and in the male seducer's penetration of the tower by partly monetary means. In this respect, the Jacobean reductionist versions of the myth can be felt to be still of relevance and resonance. However, it is the means chosen by the imprisoned women to pass the time that reveals a newer, specifically Caroline line of interpretation. For the women decide to stage a play in which they will perform all the parts – itself an obvious allusion to female court theat-

ricals in the late 1620s and early 1630s – and the story they elect to perform is that of Jupiter and Danae.

Kim Walker has read this occurrence of the play within a play of *The Bird in a Cage* as "an uneasy attempt to authorize the female actor," suggesting that in the process it serves only to "recuperate" the female actor as a means of endorsing patriarchy. [21] I would suggest, however, that Shirley's recuperation of the idea of the female actor as well as his highly original deployment of the Danae myth reveals a more radical ideology at work, one which suggests a dramatist inherently sympathetic to female agency, not least in the form of performance.

In the introduction to his recent book on *Myth*, Laurence Coupe recounts the Danae-Perseus family story as an archetypal myth, but, in a manner akin to Ovid's marginalization of Danae within the *Metamorphoses*, Coupe regards it as an archetype of the hero/warrior myth. [23] Shirley recognizes completely different archetypes: ones of relevance to the female condition. In his version of the myth of Danae, although it recognizes female agency as a genuine social possibility, women are no longer reduced to the proactive prostitutes of Jonson's Roman tragedies or city comedies, nor subjected to the polarised extremes of

Madonna/whore as reflected in Titian's sexual temptress and Mabuse's saintly artistic interpretations. Instead, in Shirley's play the story is reconfigured as a means of activating feminocentric sympathies and concerns. There were, undoubtedly, commercial motives behind Shirley's interests in *The Bird in a Cage*: it did lead to the royal commission to compose *The Triumph of Peace* the following year, the Inns of Court masque that was inaugurated by Charles I as an act of public dissociation on the part of the Inns from their dissident member Prynne's actions. The fiscal is then never far from the surface and in that way perhaps the two most common strains of the Danae myth in early Stuart literature do begin to merge. What is retrieved in this account however is the potential at least for the story to speak to rather than recontain and recircumscribe female agency. [24]

The story's various appropriations are constantly shifting, so much so that the story's history becomes less a case of "bivalent allegorization" than a multivalence of reference and referents. The myth of Danae and all facilitating myths of its kind were and indeed are in a constant state of flux, a fluid process of change. The protean possibilities, theatrical and political, are endless.

Donella, Eugenia's lady in waiting, proposes the play and its specific theme. She also suggests the imprisoned heroine's participation in the performance, initially to make up numbers. This could be read as reducing the agency that can be read into Eugenia's performance but what is interesting is the explicit assertion in the text of the skill of the performers. Donella tells her female companions: "Wee? Doe not distrust your owne performance. I ha' knowne men ha' been insufficient, but women can play their parts." [22]Of course, the *double entendre* is unavoidable but of equal portent is the applicability of the performed play to the women's own 'real-life' situation:

Donella elects to play Jove and Eugenia, aptly enough, Danae. As with the Jupiter-Calisto scene in *The Golden Age* Shirley exploits the homoerotic potential in this same-sex encounter. The arrival of the caged birds (in which, understandably, Eugenia sees a further analogue to her personal situation) interrupts the seduction scene of the playlet and Donella teasingly suggests things might have ceased to be mere acting had the performance continued: "Beshrew the Belman, and had you not wak'd as you did Madam, I

should ha' forgot my self and play'd Jupiter indeed with you, my imaginations were strong upon me; and you lay so sweetly . . . how now?" (ll. 32-5, p. 56). What this also suggests, in stark contrast to the failed 'performances' of the men attempting to access the tower, which include ludicrous attempts at cross-dressing, is that the women's acting is convincing and persuasive.

Hidden in the cage is the disguised Philenzo who then subjects Eugenia to a second 'feigned' or acted rape (like that of Danae by Jupiter in the playlet) in order to test her loyalty to him. Earlier in the play, Philenzo had himself used the Danae storyline as a facilitating myth for his intention to fulfil the wager with the avaricious Duke of Mantua: "I will fall upon her, a Jupiter or Danae, let me have a shower of gold, Acrisius brazen tower shall melt agen, were there an Army about it, I would compass her in a Moneth, or dye it." (ll. 14-17, p. 13). By paralleling Jupiter and Danae in his materialistic interpretation of the story, he accords both of them with agency, an irony in view of his subjection of Eugenia to the aforementioned sexual testing. The whole question of female agency is fraught with dangers in this multi-layered play.

References

1. Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, in *Elizabethan Sonnets*, ed. Maurice Evans (London: Dent, 1977; repr. 1984). This article is dedicated to the memory of Jeremy Maule who was the inspiration behind it and much else I have written since.
2. Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992). See also Philip Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).
3. Richard Tarrant, "Ovid and ancient literary history," in Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, 13-33 (26). Tarrant's prime example of this strategy is Ovid's telling of Dido's story and Orpheus's descent into the underworld.
4. *Ovid's Metamorphoses translated by Arthur Golding*, ed. Madeleine Forey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), 5:8-13.
5. See C.F. Wheeler, *Classical Mythology in the Plays, Masques, and Poems of Ben Jonson* (London and New York: Kennikat Press, 1938) and DeWitt Starnes and Ernest William Talbert, *Classical Myth and Legend in Renaissance Dictionaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina P, 1955).
6. Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander* Sestiad 1.146, in *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Poems and Translations*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). See also *Elegies* 2.19.27 and 3.4.21 in the same collection. It is worth observing that Marlowe captures Danae in a moment of incarceration rather than action in the Venus's temple allusion.
7. All references to Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (London and New York: Norton, 1997).
8. In a modern context, the ambiguity persists in a version of the story such as Ted Hughes's in his *Tales from Ovid: 24 passages from the 'Metamorphoses'* (London: Faber, 1997): "The lap of Danae opened/ Only to a shower of gold" (179).
9. Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, in *The Selected Plays of Ben Jonson*, Volume I, ed. Johanna Proctor (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).
10. See Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001). My thanks to Alizon Brunning for discussion of this topic.
11. Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), 88-89.
12. Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*, 89.
13. *The Odes of Horace*, trans. and ed. James Michie (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964; repr. 1978), 3:16: 1-12.

15. Ben Jonson, *Catiline*, ed. W.F. Bolton and Jane F. Gardner (London: Arnold, 1973).
16. Ben Jonson, *Eastward Ho!*, ed. R.W. Van Fossen (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1979).
17. Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, in *The Selected Plays of Ben Jonson Volume 2*, ed. Martin Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).
18. Kathleen E. McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 16-20.
19. Thomas Heywood, *The Golden Age*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood* (London: Pearson, 1874), Volume 3, 33.
20. *The Golden Age*, 18. Cf. *Othello*, 5.2.368-9.
21. See Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1999), esp. 30-42, and Sophie Tomlinson, "'She That Plays the King': Henrietta Maria and the Threat of the Actress in Caroline Culture," in Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope (eds), *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After* (London: Routledge, 1992), 189-207.
22. Kim Walker, "'New Prison': Representing the Female Actor in Shirley's *The Bird in a Cage*," *English Literary Renaissance* 21 (1991): 383-400, 395.
23. Frances Frazer Senescu, *James Shirley's The Bird in a Cage: A Critical Edition* (New York and London: Garland, 1980), ll.1-3, 42.
24. Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (London: Routledge, 1997).
25. A related argument has recently been made for the myth of Dido in Michael Burden (ed.), *A Woman Scorn'd: Responses to the Dido Myth* (London: Faber, 1998).
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41. McLuskie, Kathleen E. *Dekker and Heywood*. London: Macmillan, 1994.
42. Ovid. *Ovid's Metamorphoses translated by Arthur Golding*. Ed. Madeleine Forey. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002.